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Author(s): Susan Kent

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THE DIFFERENTIATION OF NAVAJO CULTURE, BEHAVIOR, AND MATERIAL CULTURE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN CULTURE CHANGE¹

Susan Kent
Iowa State University

Navajos do not emphasize sexual differences in organizing their use of space, objects, or division of labor to the same extent as do other groups. That they do not differentiate or divide their universe as other groups do is reflected in their culture, behavior, and material culture. This contrasts with, for example, their neighboring Anglo-Americans and Spanish-Americans, who emphasize the basic biological differences between males and females as one organizing principle in which they divide their world. The lack of Navajo differentiation can be seen in traditional Navajo culture as a relatively weak division of labor and a general lack of emphasis placed on the differences between the sexes (Kent 1980). The opposite—the use of sex-specific and monofunctional objects and activity areas—is characteristic of groups which tend to divide or differentiate their world.

No group is completely undifferentiated as such, but is so only in relation to other groups. The amount of differentiation among various groups must be compared against each other to establish relative measures. Navajos were contrasted with Anglo-Americans and Spanish-Americans in order to have a baseline from which the Navajos could be compared. Navajos, relative to these groups are undifferentiated; but are actually more differentiated than other groups such as the Bushmen.

Today, Navajo culture, if viewed as a continuum, ranges from traditional to nontraditional.² In 1978, nine Navajo families were studied in order to observe their activities at various times and places. Their lifeways varied from traditional to semi-nontraditional. No nontraditional families were observed since most live in off-reservation cities beyond my study area.

NAVAJOS: PAST AND PRESENT

The lack of differentiation or segmentation in Navajo culture can be seen in Navajos' conception of the differences between the sexes. Biology constrains, but it does not determine the behavior of the sexes, and the differences which groups place on the interpretation of biology are the result of a group's culture (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974:5). Beyond basic biological differences between the sexes, which are perceived by every group, Navajos do not think of males and females as

being as different as they are thought to be by some other groups (Kent 1980). For example, Shepardson and Hammond (1970:66-67) noted that:

Because of the simplicity and homogeneity of traditional Navajo society, one can safely say that there is a consensus on the definition of roles, that expectations for proper role behavior are shared by the society as a whole. No roles except the strictly biological male role is closed to women.

This is in marked contrast to such groups as traditional Anglo-Americans who believe that the difference between the sexes is substantial (Graebner 1975; Mead 1967). The result of this belief is that special deodorants, vitamins, and cold cereals are advertised as being specifically for use by one sex or the other because of their different needs.

The less segmented view of the sexes can also be seen in the Navajos' weakly differentiated division of labor (Downs 1972; Kluckhohn and Leighton 1962; Kluckhohn, Hill, and Kluckhohn 1971; Lamphere 1977). For instance, both males and females of all ages were consistently observed herding sheep. Either men or women would purchase groceries and other items at the local trading post. One sex did not dominate the performance of various chores like wood chopping, butchering, planting crops, and so on. This does not mean, however, that there is neither a division of labor nor a perceived difference between the sexes among the Navajos. One example is that food preparation and child care were most frequently, although by no means exclusively, conducted by women. In general, Navajos emphasize the differences between the sexes substantially less than Anglo-Americans or Spanish-Americans and have a much less rigid division of labor (see Table 1).

Furthermore, Navajos are less differentiated than Anglo-Americans or Spanish-Americans in other aspects of culture. Unlike those groups, Navajos do not have individual function-specific or sex-specific occupations, nor do they have hierarchies like socioeconomic classes or political stratification. Examples of the former in traditional Anglo-American society are male lumberjacks and ship captains and female housewives and secretaries. Even traditional Navajo religion is not markedly differentiated compared to Anglo-American religions—the number of separate religions, like Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Mormon, in itself is an indication of differentiation. In addition, many Anglo-American religions have hierarchies, another indication of differentiation. These hierarchical levels range from good to evil where Jesus and/or God are above angels, who are above ministers/priests, who are above laymen, who are above those who do not believe, who are above the devil.

There are other indicators of the amount of differentiation present in Navajo culture vis-à-vis different groups like Anglo-Americans or Spanish-Americans, one of which is their view of the natural world (Kent 1980:266). Although Anglo-Americans view the material world as a sphere of conquest while Spanish-Americans see humans as subjugated by nature, both groups view man and nature as a distinct dichotomy (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961:13). This distinction is not made by Navajos, "If the conceptualization of the man-nature relationship is that of Harmony, there is no real separation of man, nature, and supernature. One is simply an extension of the other, and a conception of wholeness derives from their unity" (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961:13).

Relative to other groups, Navajo views of good and evil are additionally not very differentiated. Anglo-Americans, for example, often consider people and things as either good or bad—the two tend to be mutually exclusive categories (Kent 1980:266). In comparison:

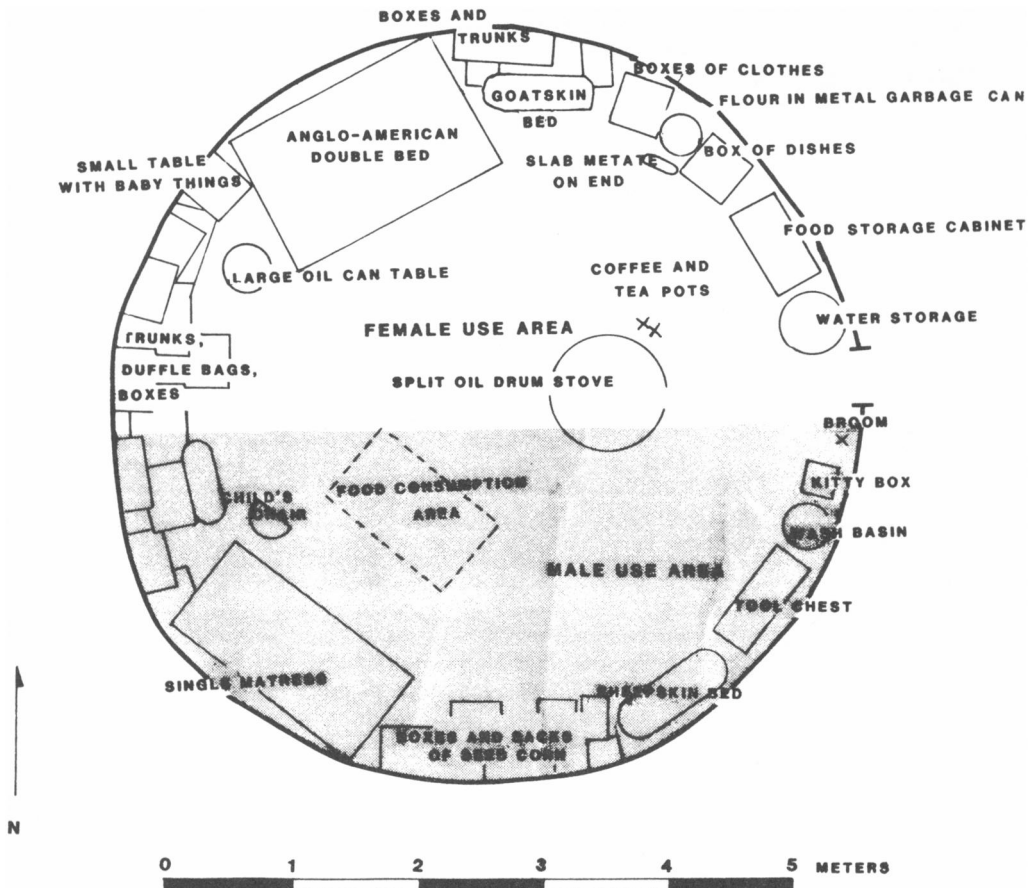
"Not definitely bad although not entirely good either" is a view reiterated time and again in the whole corpus of Navaho texts. . . . The Navaho conception is not Neutral towards *human nature*. It is definitely a mixture of Good and Evil, and this mixture is immutable (Romney and Kluckhohn 1961:335).

The absence of sex-specific areas of use in Navajo households (except for traditional Navajos' use of hogans discussed below) reflects the lack of emphasis placed on the differences between males and females and their relatively flexible division of labor. The Navajos observed do not use separate sex-specific areas, other than those inside the hogans of traditional households. Even then, the use of sex-specific space is adhered to only by traditional Navajos and only when inside the hogan. For example, the male head of one traditional family almost never ventured beyond the southeastern quadrant of the hogan (Figure 1). He ate, repaired objects, made tools like leather quirts, and slept on his sheepskin bed there. During the entire month I lived with this family, he was observed in the northern part of the hogan on only four rather unusual occasions. In every case, his stay in the northern part of the hogan was very brief, lasting no more than a few minutes each time.

The women used the northern half of the hogan the most. They wove baskets, slept, cooked, and performed a variety of activities there. Despite the fact that similar activities as those conducted inside the hogan were performed inside the ramada (e.g., sleeping, eating, cooking, talking, repairing objects, and so on), the same family did not divide the ramada, or the out-of-doors into sex-specific areas of use.

The reason that traditional Navajos separate the hogan into male and female use areas is because the circular hogan symbolizes the circular cosmos which is

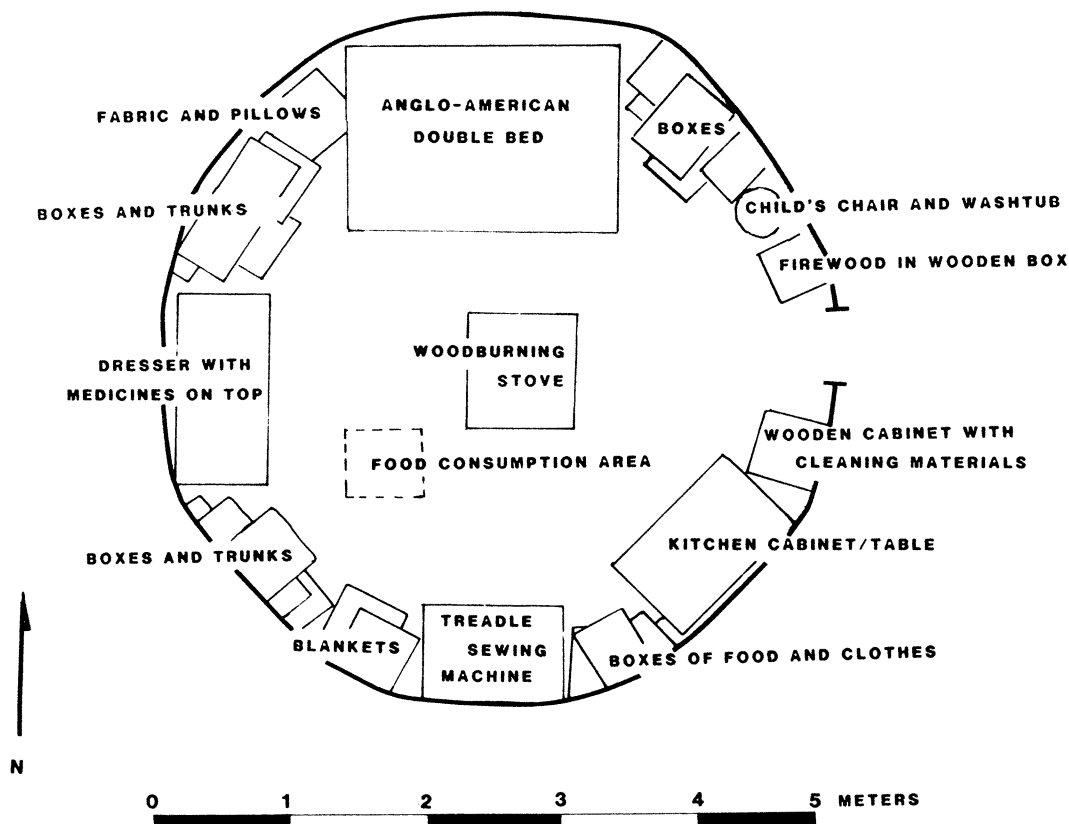
FIGURE 1: Traditional Navajo Hogan



also divided into male and female areas (Kent 1982). This can be seen in the sacred status traditional Navajos ascribe to the hogan, even when it is used for nonsacred activities (see, for example, Louis 1975:3; Kluckhohn and Leighton 1962:89). In addition, parts of many ceremonies can only be conducted inside a round structure or hogan. The rectangular ramada, where similar activities as those conducted inside the hogan are performed, and the out-of-doors are not divided into sex-specific space because they are not round, or sacred (Kent 1982). The use of sex-specific space inside the hogan, which is the opposite of the use of space elsewhere, also aids in maintaining the boundary between sacred hogan space and nonsacred space everywhere else (Kent 1982). In other words, the use of space in the hogan is anomalous compared to the use of space elsewhere and can be explained by the circular shape of the hogan and its representation of the circular cosmos, both of which are divided into the same sexual division of space. Unlike other groups, the Navajo use of space in the hogan is not a reflection of their division of labor, but is, instead, a reflection of the cosmos.

Less traditional Navajos do not divide hogan space or anywhere else into separate sex-specific areas. Both men and women work, sleep, and eat in the same part of the hogan. For instance, the women and the male and female children of one semitraditional family wash dishes in the southeastern quadrant of the hogan, or in the same area where both men and women prepare meals (Figure 2). Both the male and female heads of this semitraditional household sleep on a mattress laid on the southeastern part of their hogan floor, sit on the northern Anglo-

FIGURE 2: Semitraditional Navajo Family's
Tar-paper and Plaster-board Hogan



American manufactured bed to work or talk, and cook meals at the central woodburning stove (Figure 2). The men and women of this family even sat together during a small curing ceremony that was held inside their tar-paper and plaster-board hogan, although both the singer officiating and her patient did sit in their proper traditional positions in the western part of the structure.

The absence of the use of sex-specific areas everywhere except inside traditional Navajos' hogans is congruent with the Navajos' relative lack of emphasis placed on the differences between the sexes and their relatively flexible division of labor compared to other groups. Thus, traditional and semi-nontraditional Navajos use space in a similar, although not identical, way. Despite the differences, traditional and semi-nontraditional Navajos use space more similarly to one another than they do to other groups, such as Anglo-Americans or Spanish-Americans.

Traditional rural and urban Anglo-Americans, for example, use relatively numerous sex-specific activity areas. The kitchen is considered women's domain by the people observed, whereas the den is the men's. Storage areas, such as various closets and dressers, are used by only one sex. One Anglo-American household even segregated their bathrooms by the sex of the principal user who then kept his or her toilet articles stored there.

A characteristic of Navajo behavior for both traditional and semitraditional households was the use of the same areas for a diverse range of functionally distinct activities. It was not unusual to observe an area used by either or both sexes for a variety of different activities. For example, at different times during the day, a traditional woman was observed weaving a blanket at the same out-of-doors locus at which her husband had earlier manufactured a leather quirt. In a semitraditional family, both men and women chopped wood at the wood chip area which also occasionally doubled as a cooking area. At the same wood chip area, the male head of the family was observed roasting meat for lunch, and on different occasions, his wife boiled stew or made *náneeskaadi* ("tortilla" bread) at the hearth. In this same household, both men and women would sit on the Anglo-American manufactured bed in the northern part of their tar-paper and plaster-board hogan in order to perform a variety of functionally unrelated activities, such as eating, repairing objects, talking, and taking short naps (Figure 2). At one semi-nontraditional family's cinder block house, both males and females ate meals either on or near the southern couch or at the northern kitchen table, where different unrelated activities also occurred. Anglo-American and, to a lesser extent, Spanish-American, households had monofunctional areas of use where only related activities were performed. These tended to be bathrooms and bedrooms in the Spanish-American homes and also kitchens, dining rooms, and dens in the Anglo-American houses.

Other aspects of Navajo behavior also indicate less differentiation relative to other groups. The Anglo-American breakfast, lunch, and dinner, for instance, are conceptually different from those of the Navajo in that they require different foods, such as cereal or eggs for breakfast, sandwiches for lunch, and meat, potatoes and/or vegetables or salad for dinner (Kent 1980:268-269). Although ethnically specific foods like tortillas and posole are eaten, the Spanish-Americans also use different types of foods for different meals. This distinction, which is not a reflection of their financial situation, is virtually nonexistent among Navajos, who eat mutton, fry bread and/or pinto beans or whatever, three times a day. In other words, Navajos do not consider each meal as a separate, or differentiated entity requiring different foods (Kent 1980:269). In addition, certain foods are considered by many Anglo-Americans to be masculine or feminine; for example, quiche is associated with females in contrast to red meat which is associated with males (Michael Whiteford, personal communication).

A final example of the lack of differentiation present in Navajo behavior is based on my sleeping arrangements at various Navajo households, which

remained fairly consistent. I usually slept in a bed with at least several (and sometimes many) children of both sexes, although empty beds were available (Kent 1980). However, I always had my own bed at the Anglo-American households, even if it meant displacing a child so I could have his/her double bed to myself. Each bed did not have a separate occupant among the Navajos, even if children were of the opposite sex; again, a less individualistic and differentiated view than that present among Anglo-Americans.³

The lack of differentiation evident in Navajo culture and behavior is also present in their material culture. Traditional Navajos did not usually divide objects into separate categories based on the gender who used them. As a result, Navajos had fewer sex-specific and monofunctional objects. For example:

Though one sex or the other dominated, use roles tended to be mixed. For example, women made and used pottery and most baskets, on occasion, however, these were used by male chanters. Men dressed in buckskin, but women made and used many articles manufactured from it, including ropes, saddles, moccasins, and skin bags. Men did not grind corn, but used the metate and mano to grind pigments for a sandpainting or bark for dyeing buckskin. The batten used by a woman in weaving might be borrowed by a man to smooth a sandpainting. [The latter two examples also indicate the prevalence of multipurpose tools.] In addition, there was evidence that not only was the same type of tool used by men and women, but the same tool was transferred from one to another as needed. (Kluckhohn, Hill, and Kluckhohn 1971:429.)

In contrast, Anglo-Americans use numerous function-specific objects (e.g., salad forks, regular forks, and soup spoons, tea spoons, grapefruit spoons, sugar spoons, serving spoons, and butter knives, steak knives, paring knives, serrated knives, and water glasses, juice glasses, wine glasses, whisky glasses, milk glasses, various cocktail glasses, etc.). Anglo-American clothes are far more differentiated than those of the Navajo. Although not as pronounced as among the Anglo-Americans, the Spanish-Americans also used monofunctional objects like tea-spoons, soup spoons, etc. and different clothes for different activities. Regardless of their economic situation, however, Navajos slept in the same clothes that they had worn that day and plan to wear the next (Kent 1980:27). Navajos did not have many sex-specific artifacts relative to Anglo-Americans, who consider kitchen objects and cleaning equipment like washing machines and irons to be in the females' domain in contrast to power saws, wood working tools, automobile tools, and lawn equipment, which are in the males' domain.

NAVAJOS: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

While Navajos are comparatively isomorphic as a people, there are some differences present between traditional, semitraditional, and semi-nontraditional Navajo families. For example, there appears to be a trend towards increased differentiation or segmentation of the culture, behavior, and material culture by less traditional families, although such differentiation is definitely and substantially less than that found in some non-Navajo groups (see Table 1).

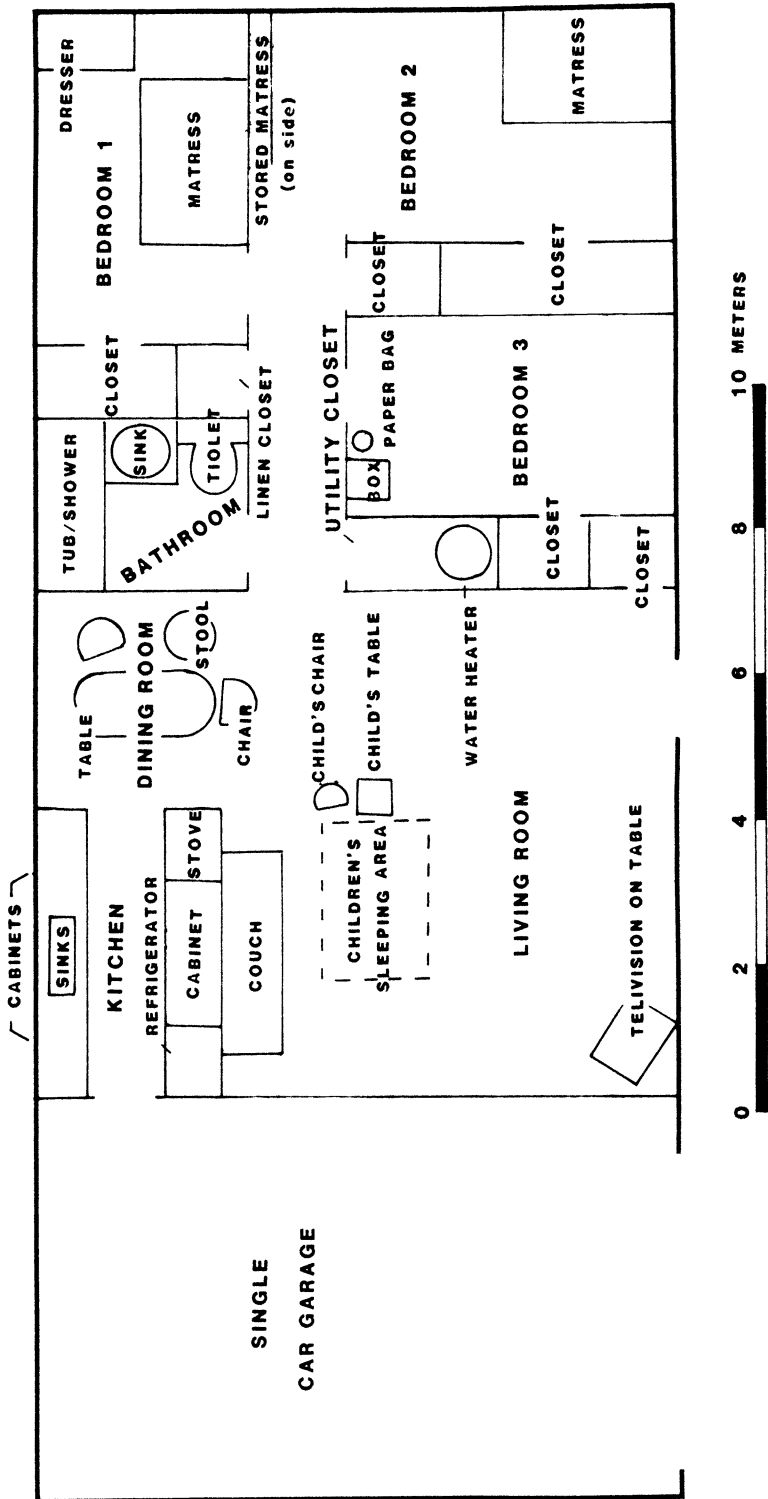
Observations of a semi-nontraditional Navajo family who lived in a three bedroom Anglo-American manufactured house revealed the use of some monofunctional areas and artifacts. For example, the kitchen, which was used for food preparation and the cleaning of utensils, and the bathroom, where a specific set of activities took place, were both monofunctional (Figure 3). It is significant that the children in the family slept in the living room, despite the fact that two bedrooms, one of which contained a mattress bed, were vacant. Other areas, like the dining room, were the locus of various types of activities. The same semi-nontraditional family also used more monofunctional artifacts, such as kitchen utensils and plates that were only used in either food preparation or consumption. This trend away from the use of multipurpose tools and activity areas was also observed at other semi-nontraditional families (Kent 1980).

TABLE 1
The Relative Location on the Segmentation-Unity Continuum
of Various Aspects of the Three Groups Investigated
(modified from Kent 1980)

	Segmentation [*] -----continuum-----		Unity
Emphasis on the differences between the sexes	Urban Anglo-Americans Rural Anglo-Americans	Rural Spanish-Americans	Traditional Navajos Semitraditional Navajos Semi-nontraditional Navajos
Division of labor	Urban Anglo-Americans Rural Anglo-Americans	Rural Spanish-Americans	Traditional Navajos Semitraditional Navajos Semi-nontraditional Navajos
Sex specific activity areas	Urban Anglo-Americans Rural Anglo-Americans	Traditional Navajos *	Rural Spanish-Americans Semitraditional Navajos Semi-nontraditional Navajos
Sex specific artifacts	Urban Anglo-Americans Rural Anglo-Americans		Rural Spanish-Americans Traditional Navajos Semitraditional Navajos Semi-nontraditional Navajos
Specialization	Urban Anglo-Americans Rural Anglo-Americans	Rural Spanish-Americans	Traditional Navajos Semitraditional Navajos Semi-nontraditional Navajos
Hierarchies	Urban Anglo-Americans Rural Anglo-Americans	Rural Spanish-Americans	Traditional Navajos Semitraditional Navajos Semi-nontraditional Navajos
Monofunctional activity areas	Urban Anglo-Americans Rural Anglo-Americans	Rural Spanish Americans Semi-nontraditional Navajos	Traditional Navajos Semitraditional Navajos Semi-nontraditional Navajos
Monofunctional artifacts	Urban Anglo-Americans Rural Anglo-Americans	Rural Spanish-Americans Semi-nontraditional Navajos	Traditional Navajos Semitraditional Navajos Semi-nontraditional Navajos
Frequency and diversity of artifacts	Urban Anglo-Americans Rural Anglo-Americans	Rural Spanish-Americans Semi-nontraditional Navajos	Traditional Navajos Semitraditional Navajos Semi-nontraditional Navajos

* This apparent inconsistency is explained in Kent(1980 and 1982).

FIGURE 3: Semi-nontraditional Navajo Family's Anglo-American-style Three Bedroom House



Another change noted was in the use of the hogan. It had lost its symbolic sacredness to the semitraditional and semi-nontraditional families and had become as profane as any Anglo-American-style house (Kent 1982). In fact, as mentioned above, one semitraditional family used sacrilegious seating arrangement during a sacred curing ceremony held inside their hogan. The ceremony probably was held in their tar-paper hogan because they had been taught that that is where ceremonies are held (and the singer would have otherwise objected). However, the symbolism of the hogan, which was the reason for holding the ceremony there, had been lost as this family employed both native and western cures in a vain attempt to straddle two cultures. As a consequence, unlike the traditional families, there were no sex-specific use areas in either this or other semitraditional families' hogans or in semi-nontraditional families' Anglo-American-style houses.

A more rigid division of labor is beginning to emerge with the reliance upon wage work. Wage work was performed only by males in the families observed, but this was probably more a consequence of the Anglo-American culture of the people who hired them than of the Navajo culture. The men are gone all day and thus cannot perform many tasks around the house, which are left to the women. Thus, women alone now perform such tasks as chopping wood, buying groceries, and other activities that previously had been shared by both sexes. The important ramification of this is that there is an emerging stricter division of labor wherein jobs are differentiated by the sex of the performer.

I do not have the necessary data to ascertain to what extent such differentiation has affected these families' perception of the sexes or the emphasis placed on the differences between males and females. Nevertheless, I believe that in the future the trend will be from a less differentiated view of the universe to a more differentiated one, corresponding to the degree to which a family has departed from traditional culture. There should be a slow trend towards an increased emphasis on the differences between males and females, a more rigid division of labor, an increased use of monofunctional and sex-specific areas and an increase in the number of sex-specific and monofunctional objects used. Navajos, once seminomadic pastoralists, are becoming increasingly sedentary. Sedentism permits, among other things, the accumulation of sex-specific and monofunctional objects, whereas mobility restricts the number of objects one can possess by the amount one is able to transport and/or cache.

A similar trend of change has been noted with other groups, partly as the result of the same influences—the introduction of wage work and sedentism. For example, among the !Kung Bushmen

Features of sedentary life that appear to be related to a decrease in women's autonomy and influence are: increasing rigidity in sex-typing of adult work; more permanent attachment of the individual to a particular place and group of people; dissimilar childhood socialization for boys and girls; decrease in the mobility of women as contrasted with men; changing nature of women's subsistence contribution; richer material inventory with implications for women's work; tendency for men to have greater access to and control over important resources such as wage work; male entrance into extravillage politics; settlement pattern; and increasing household privacy (Draper 1975:78).

It is an exciting prospect for the study of culture change that this trend may be a cross-cultural one resulting from the impact of certain aspects of highly differentiated Western European (and Anglo-American) culture, such as sedentism and wage work, on groups which tend not to differentiate their universe. This may allow for the development of predictive models for situations in which groups who strongly differentiate their culture, behavior, and material culture affect those who do not.

CONCLUSIONS

The Navajos, as a group, do not differentiate their universe as much as do other groups. This can be seen in various aspects of their culture, such as the lack of emphasis placed on the differences between the sexes, the rigidity of their division of labor, and in their behavior and material culture, as the paucity of sex-specific and monofunctional areas of use and artifacts utilized, compared to Anglo- and Spanish-Americans. Since these are not absolute categories, it is necessary to contrast Navajos to other groups, such as Anglo-Americans, in order to be able to measure the relative amount of differentiation present in Navajo culture, behavior, and material culture. This is a procedure that is usually only implicitly and unsystematically done by ethnographers when they state, for example, that a group is egalitarian or stratified. The Bushmen, for instance, are not egalitarian as such, but are so in comparison to many groups like Anglo-Americans or Navajos. Thus, explicit comparisons are necessary when dealing with relative concepts such as the amount of differentiation present: rigidity of the division of labor; emphasis placed on the differences between the sexes; the use of sex-specific and monofunctional areas and material culture, and so on.

Fieldwork indicated that there is some variation between traditional, semitradi-tional, and semi-nontraditional Navajos. The fieldwork elucidated an apparent trend in which the less traditional a Navajo family is, the more rigid their division of labor, the more sex-specific and monofunctional areas are used, and the more sex-specific and monofunctional objects are utilized. The trend is the result of changes in Navajo economics and sedentism and the ramifications of these changes has been a shift towards a more differentiated or segmented culture, behavior, and material culture. This trend may be a cross-cultural one which results from a group's interaction with and influence from those who differentiate their universe to a comparatively greater extent, such as Anglo-Americans or Europeans. However, it must be noted that even the semi-nontraditional Navajos observed were still distinctly Navajo and differed substantially from other groups. It is true that they were not the Navajos of the first part of the twentieth century, but neither were they anything but distinctly Navajo. Only the future and further research will foretell the exact path of Navajo change, but this paper indicates one specific area and direction of that change.

NOTES

1. This article is based on fieldwork conducted among Navajos in the Navajo Mountain, Utah, area. Participant-observation fieldwork was also conducted among rural Spanish-Americans and rural and urban Anglo-Americans. I thank Joyce Griffen, Patricia Draper, Louise Lamphere, Michael Whiteford, and Judy Rose for reading and providing helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I also thank my Navajo, Anglo-American, and Spanish-American friends who so kindly allowed me to participate in part of their lives. I appreciate the artistic skill of Karen Kramer, who drafted Figures, 1, 2, and 3, which are adapted from Kent (1980).

2. There usually are, within any one group of people, individuals who more readily embrace change than others. Therefore, within any one group, there are people who can be classified as more traditional than others and, as a consequence, there is a continuum among contemporaneous Navajos which ranges from traditional to nontraditional individuals.

As a result of the relative paucity of ethnographic information concerning the Navajos of AD 1500 to 1800 (the ethnographic present), another criterion must be used for this discussion. The baseline for the definition of traditional Navajos in this study is that period of extensive ethnographic research from around 1900 to 1950 (e.g., Franciscan Fathers 1910; Kluckhohn 1944; Kluckhohn and Leighton 1962; Reichard 1950; and others). As discussed elsewhere (Kent 1980:31-35), traditional Navajos are defined as those who only speak Navajo, maintain sheep and goat herds, hold certain beliefs (such as the fear of the dead), live only in hogans and ramadas, perform specific ceremonies (such as a baby's first laugh ceremony), observe mother-in-law avoidance, and manufacture native arts and crafts. In contrast, nontraditional families are those who are fluent in English, have a full-time wage earner in the family, live in Anglo-American-style houses, and are, in general, familiar with nontraditional beliefs, including those from neighboring cultures (Kent 1980:34-35). However, the members of the nontraditional category are still distinctly Navajo. The

families who fall between these polar contrasts are categorized as semitraditional or semi-nontraditional.

3. It is difficult to assess the significance of sharing a bed with others in the Spanish-American households. In both Spanish-American households in which I stayed, there were no empty beds available. Under similar circumstances, Anglo-American families displaced a child in order that I might have a bed alone. The importance of hierarchical statuses among Spanish-Americans, and my age (relatively young) and gender, may have influenced the families' decision to have me share a bed (but always only with another female).

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